

Essential Questions

Sources: G. Wiggins & J. McTighe (ASCD), Weston Public Schools (MA), Wallingford Public Schools (CT), McDougal Littell (2007), & J. Hockett (U.Va.)

Social Studies

- What happened in the past? How can we know if we weren't there?
- Whose "story" is this?
- Whom do we believe and why?
- Is history invariably the story told by the "winners"? How do we avoid that?
- What kinds of things do "good" citizens do? Says who?
- How should governments balance the rights of individuals with the common good?
- Should _____ be restricted/regulated? (e.g., immigration, alcohol/drugs, media, etc.) When? Who decides?
- What is the difference between 'needs' and 'wants'?
- How does something acquire value? What is this "worth"? How much should this cost?
- What goods and services should government provide? How should they be paid for? Who should decide?
- Why is/was _____ located there? (e.g., capitol, factory, battle, etc.)
- How does geography, climate and natural resources affect the way people live and work there?
- Why do people move?
- How do maps and globes reflect history, politics, and economics?
- Are modern civilizations more 'civilized' than ancient ones?
- Who are the "heroes" and what do they reveal about a culture?
- Why do people fight? Is conflict inevitable?
- What is worth fighting for?
- How is a state's identity created?
- How is who I am related to where I live?
- Why do so many maps of the world look different?
- How important is status?
- Is Internet access a right or a privilege?
- What drives competition?
- Who are a war's winners and losers?
- What does it mean to make a living?
- What story do maps and globes tell?
- How is power gained, used, and justified?
- What are the benefits and challenges of a diverse society?
- What does it mean to be civilized?
- Who's responsible?

Mathematics

- If math is a language, what does it permit us to talk about that other languages cannot easily do?
- When is the "correct" mathematical answer not the best solution to a problem?
- When is simplification helpful/harmful?

- In what ways does this math model illuminate and what ways does it potentially mislead us about the phenomena?
- Can everything be quantified?
- What can numbers show better than words?
- Can math predict the future?
- How might we show (represent) _____? In what other way (how else) ?
- When is estimation okay? Best? When is sampling better than counting?
- What is the pattern?
- How much/many (of a sample) is enough (sufficient)?
- How can statistics (data) lie/mislead? How can we avoid being misled?
- How does what we measure influence how we measure? How does how we measure influence what we measure?
- How accurate (precise) does this need to be?
- How is ____ changing?
- Why is an order of operations necessary?
- Given _____, what can we conclude? What can't we conclude?
- How do we best show (represent) multi-dimensional data?
- How can we determine rate of change? Where and why is this important?
- Why is calculus necessary? What can't algebra do?
- What makes a game fair or unfair?
- Where can we find examples of symmetry in the real world?
- How can we understand and use other number systems?
- Why do we need standard units of measurement?
- How exact does a measurement have to be?
- How is thinking algebraically different from thinking algorithmically?
- How do people use data to influence others?

Reading, Writing, & Literature

- What makes a great book/story great?
- Is a "good read" always a great book?
- Is a reader ever obligated to finish a book?
- Can fiction reveal truth? What is the relationship between "fiction" and "truth?"
- How are stories from other places and times about me?
- Have we run across this idea before?
- So what? Why does it matter? What does it mean?
- Should a story teach you something?
- Must a story have a beginning, middle, and end?
- Must a story have a moral? Heroes and villains?
- What do good readers look like and sound like?
- How many meanings does this word have? In what ways is it good and bad to have the same word mean different things? What if words could mean anything at all?
- How do my beliefs and experiences influence how I read this book?
- How much choice is there in punctuation?
- What is the author saying? What makes you say that?
- What does the text mean? How do you know?
- How should I read different types of texts?
- What does the title suggest? How appropriate is it? What might be a (better) title?

- What do good readers do when the text doesn't make sense?
- From what point of view can his be read? Understood?
- What is the gist? What is the main idea?
- How does my experience and belief influence my reading?
- How can I better read "read between the lines"?
- What is a "complete" thought?
- Does a writer have an obligation to help the reader understand?
- How do effective writers hook and hold their readers?
- Why am I writing? For whom?
- Am I writing what I know or what I want to explore in myself or the world?
- How can you say something well without saying it?
- How can I incorporate new words into my lexicon?
- How is written language different from spoken language?
- Who needs a style guide, and why?
- Is it possible to think without language?
- What makes a word a word? What makes a word "fit" for the dictionary?
- Who is a victim?
- What myths do I tell myself? What myths do I tell other people?
- Whose opinion matters?
- In what ways is censorship unavoidable?
- How does conflict lead to change?
- Am I my brother's keeper?
- The American Dream—whose is it?
- When does information become propaganda?
- How has the concept of utopia changed and stayed the same over time and across cultures?
- Is honor worth dying for?
- Can you ever be too ambitious?
- Would you rather be loved or respected?
- Should we fear change?
- Is emotion stronger than reason?
- What is the price of freedom?
- Is safety an illusion?
- Do all cages have bars?
- Does everyone have a dark side?
- When is silence louder than words?
- Is there such a thing as "the unforgivable sin"?

Art & Music

- What is art? How does it differ from "crafts"?
- Where can we find art?
- Why create art?
- What can artworks tell us about a culture or society? How can they mislead us about that culture/society?
- In what ways do artists influence society? In what ways does society influence artists?

- What makes art "great"?
- How rational or process-based is art?
- What is beauty? Says who?
- Do artists have a responsibility to their audiences?
- Is the best art apolitical or political?
- Should we ever "censure" artistic expression?
- How does music reflect sociology, language, and culture?
- What does the music I like reveal about who I am?
- Why are some musical style appreciated by some people and disliked by others?
- What makes "good" music? Is there "bad" music?
- What makes a song a "hit"?
- Should music be censored? By whom? For whom?
- How does where you live influence what music you listen to?
- What does music tell us about human nature?
- What inspires musical composition?
- How is personal preference for music developed?
- How does music communicate?
- How does one musical style influence another?
- Does a performance have to be public?
- How does the style of music affect the behavior of the audience?

Science

- Why does that move that way? What makes objects move the way they do?
- What are we made of? What is everything made of? What makes any living thing what it is? What is "alive" and is *that* alive?
- How do changes in living things affect nonliving things? How do changes in nonliving things affect living things?
- How do prior knowledge, bias, and opinion affect inquiry?
- Why do we classify things?
- What forms of energy are present in everyday life?
- How are structure and function related in living things? Why does this creature do this and look like that?
- What is inherited and how does it happen? What's determined and what's an accident? How and in what ways are accidents beneficial?
- Is this error an avoidable mistake or inherent in the data?
- How can we best measure what we cannot directly see?
- How would my life be different if we could not predict the weather? How would my life be different if we could predict the weather with no error?
- "Where did it go?" (with reference to conservation of energy/matter)
- When does scientific "truth" or "fact" change?
- When is the scientific method *not* a useful process?
- How can I know when I have "enough" evidence to draw a conclusion?
- How do human activities impact and alter the environment?
- How should natural resources be used?

World Languages

- What are the key similarities and the differences between the [target language] and English?
- What is the best way to learn a new language, and what do I need to get rid of or overcome any interference caused by my speaking of English?
- How can I best comprehend and appreciate the differences when making sense of daily interactions?
- What is the best way to retain as much language as possible in long-term memory?
- How does the context help me understand words I do not know?
- What should I do when I am stuck?
- Where does this language live in my community?
- How can I sound more like a native?
- What cues should I listen and watch for before I respond?
- Which is the right question to get me the information I need?
- How do I figure out meaning when words are not understood?
- What can I do when I do not have the words to say what I am thinking?
- How can I keep the conversation going?
- What are the benefits and risks of taking a chance?
- How can I explore and describe cultures without stereotyping them?
- Why study a “dead” language?